

Alice Dunbar-Nelson 3/22/29

A black and white portrait of a woman with short, curly hair, looking directly at the camera. The image is grainy and has a high-contrast, almost solarized appearance.

Some of us remember the days of the Irish fad. When Chauncey Olcott was the matinee idol, and James K. Hackett was considered a perfect actor, because he was Irish. When Irish songs held the boards, and Irish stories and Irish poems always brought down the house. It was a fad that lasted several years, almost two decades. It was the easiest thing in the world to make a hit then. Talk a little brogue, sing about the "ould mither," and you went over big.

THEN, do you remember the Hawaiian fad? When everyone was wearing grass skirts and dislocating their hips trying to do the hula-hula? When the home that did not have at least

AND now it is the Negro. First Emperor Jones, and then a wild, mad rush that leaped the stages between minstrelsy and drama, with mad dancing in between. Abraham's Bosom, and Porgy and all the rest and the musical shows. One succeeding another in wild confusion of hectic gyrations. Then the movies and now the talkies. If you are not a Negro you just don't belong. For the most sought after powder, talcum and complexion and the most advertised cold cream is "Sun-tan." You must make up brown if you would be thought ultra.

It is not fair to spoil the good time which is being enjoyed by all at this time, with grandmotherly admonitions. But I cannot but wonder what the hundreds of young men and women who are high in the public favor are doing now to improve themselves and make the passing fad something more than a brief candle-like existence soon snuffed out and forgotten. Do the colored girls who are enjoying adulation study new steps? Are the chorus of steppers trying honestly to make themselves perfect in their art, and thus delay by some years the inevitable revulsion? Wild abandon and unsynchronized gyrations were interesting, exotic, when they first appeared a dozen years ago, but are we not beginning to look for something different now, and frankly to yawn outright when we go from theatre to theatre, cabaret to cabaret and see exactly the same steps, the same undisciplined movements, the same lack of make-up on the legs and knees, the same umbilical appeal, backing itself up with nothing solidly artistic?

TWO new things have come forth in the past decade—"Bojangles" tap dance on the steps "Snake-Hips" undulations both in "Blackbirds." And yet the latter has not shown imagination to clothe that sinuous body of his properly in smooth material suggesting the reptile he imitates. He gets himself up in a flowing blouse and red sash, like a Hawaiian—and has not a single Hawaiian movement.

ay for theatrical folk to make hay while the sun shines. To perfect themselves in their art, to devise constantly new approaches, to come as near being indispensable as possible, that way alone can they stave off the inevitable. The Hawaiian fad lasted long because it was constantly making new appeals. The Hawaiian fad was short-lived because it had nothing new to offer. It dumped its whole bag of tricks on the table at once. Will the Negro fad be like the former or the latter? It is up to the Negro actors to decide. From the biggest ones of the lot, the Robesons, the McClendons, the Millers and the Lyles and the rest, down to the smallest little brown skin cabaret dancer, wearing not much more than a few postage stamps and a winning smile, the issue is a grave one, fraught with possibilities of a long day of favor, or a brief snuffing out of the present prosperity. And the fate of the issue lies in that drab word—"STUDY."

I sat in a Philadelphia theatre watching "Hearts in Dixie" on the screen. All around me proud Nordics wept openly, and the colored men blew their noses almost as vigorously as they did when Volson sang "Sonny Boy" to his last sleep. For "Hearts in Dixie" is so full of pure hokum that it runs out all over and slops into the orchestra. As was said by "Time," it is full of the things that the white man likes to associate with the Negro—plantation songs, cotton fields, superstition, ignorance, faithfulness, etc., etc. But there are many good things to remember about it. Though the Negro peasant is faithfully depicted in his native habitat, never once do we hear the words "darky" and "nigger" used, even in their most care-free moment. (Of course we know they were saying it in reality.) The acting of Clarence Muse as Nanny is excellent, but the only bone in the flesh of the story is Fetchit, as the old actor says. He is a good actor, and less self-conscious than the white child actors are apt to be. Of course, the music was too much harmonized to be natural, although it was beautiful, appealingly lovely, but no plantation Negroes ever sang like that.

Individual Troupes, etc.
AS IN A LOOKING GLASS
Washington Craft — *H. E.*
 Alice Dunbar-Nelson 7/22

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A black and white photograph showing a dark, bulky object, likely a piece of clothing or a bag, lying on a light-colored, speckled surface. The object is positioned diagonally across the frame, with its head or top end towards the upper left. The surface it lies on appears to be a coarse, granular material like gravel or sand. The lighting is somewhat uneven, with the object's surface showing some highlights and shadows, emphasizing its texture and form.

* * *

AND now it is the Negro. First Emperor Jones, and then wild, mad rush that leaped the stages between minstrelsy and drama, with mad dancing in between. Abraham's Bosom, and Porgy and all the rest and the musical shows. One succeeding another in wild confusion of hectic gyrations. Then the movies and now the talkies. If you are not a Negro you just don't belong. For the most sought after powder, talcum and complexion and the most advertised cold cream is "Sun-lan." You must be brown if you would be thought ultra.

It is not fair to spoil the good time which is being enjoyed by all at this time, with grandmotherly admonitions. But I can not but wonder what the hundreds of young men and women who are high in the public favor are doing now to improve themselves and make the passing fad something more than a brick-candle-like existence soon snuffed out and forgotten. Do the colored girls who are enjoying adulation study new steps? Are the chorus of steppers trying honestly to make themselves perfect in their art, and thus delay by some years the inevitable revulsion? Wild abandon and unsynchronized gyrations were interesting, exotic, when they first appeared a dozen years ago, but are we not beginning to look for something different now—and frankly to yawn outright when we go from theatre to theatre and cabaret to cabaret and see exactly the same steps, the same unheeded, disciplined movements, the same lack of make-up on the legs and ankles, the same umbilical appeal, backing itself up with nothing solidly artistic?

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ay for theatrical folk to make hay while the sun shines, to perfect themselves in their art, to devise constantly, to come as near being indispensable as possible, to approach, to come as near being indispensable as possible. They can't stay off the inevitable. They can't stay off the inevitable.

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ever croaks, as do the voices of white a

arts in Dixie" has so slight a plot that you soon abandon it. It is just a series of lovely pictures, beautiful music, Uncle-Tom stuff, with plenty of hokum, designed for quick box-office returns. And if our folk are reaping good pay envelopes out in Hollywood thereby, more power to Negro hokum say I.

I sat in a Philadelphia theatre watching "Hearts in Dixie" on the screen. All around me proud Nordics wept openly, and men blew their noses almost as vigorously as they did when Al Jolson sang "Sonny Boy" to his last sleep. For "Hearts in Dixie" is so full of pure hokum that it runs out all over and slops into the orchestra. As was said by "Time," it is full of the things that the white man likes to associate with the Negro—plantation songs, cotton fields, superstition, ignorance, faithfulness, etc., etc. But there are many good things to remember about it. Though the Negro peasant is faithfully depicted in his native habitat, never once do we hear the words "darky" and "nigger" used, even in their most care-free moment. (Of course we know they were saying it in reality.) The acting of Clarence Muse as Napoleon is excellent, and the acting of the other Negroes is also good. The acting of the white actors is also good, and less self-conscious than white child actors are apt to be. Of course, the music was too much harmonized to be natural, though it was beautiful, appealingly lovely, but no plantation Negroes ever sang like that.

Ernest Hogan: A Pioneer in Musical Comedy

WROTE MANY SONGS; WAS MASTER SHOWMAN

IN THE SOUTH SEAS

By W. Rollo Wilson

With Billy McClain he went to Honolulu and there the pair produced many little shows, finally sailing for Australia. In the Atchafalaya section, continuing, giving them the assurance that they could do something big.

Back home they came and the pair was backed by Gus Hill, king of burlesque. They organized "The Smart Set" company and offered "Smart Set" as its first production.

A notable company was theirs when this experiment opened in New Britain, Conn., in 1904. I have

There was Hogan's wife Wilkes, then one of the most beautiful of women. A soprano singer, Cordelia, a portly, queenly, a true mezzo-soprano in every inch of her height and girth. Jerry Mills in a tramp character. Ben Hann, of the famous Hunn brothers.

Henry Jackson Norris, of Brook-lyn, who had sung in Sweden, and who was the company's first tenor. All Coons Look Alike to Me," "Missionary Man," "Wouldn't That be a Dream?" and "On Emancipation Day."

Pauline Freeman, the only colored woman acrobat of the time, in an act with Russell Brandau. In after years, (1904?) Brandau went to England and has never returned. He married Stella Wylie over there and she was Bob Cole's first wife.

Barrington Carter, then in the full strength of his young life, in a "rube" role. Marian Smart, cast obscurely in the chorus, later to displace the temperamental Wilkes.

(Two memories I have of Marian Smart. The first was up in the off regions and when she appeared singing something about "googly eyes" I thought she was the most beautiful being on earth. The other was in Philadelphia a few years later and more than 20 years ago and she was still the most beautiful being as she sang the popular "Won't You be My Little Brown Bear" song. I glimpse the smiling yesterday's now Sandy!)

A RENOWNED QUARTET

The Dinwiddie quartet of Philadelphia, was a sensation of the show. They were Sterling Rex, first tenor; J. Clarence Meredith, second tenor; Harry B. Cruder, first base; J. Mantell Thomas, second bass.

This four had a history of its own and it is meet that I tell it. It had been organized to sing in the interests of the John A. Dix industrial school of Dinwiddie, Va., by Charles B. Cheshire. For two years they sang in Y. M. C. A. buildings, churches, etc., and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars to be donated to the cause. One man built a \$50,000 building on the campus as a memorial to his father. After the death of Cheshire they went into Gaudeville and from there to Hogan's show. They stayed with him for one

season, went back to the three-day and disbanded in 1904. I have lost track of all except Sterling Rex, who is one of the best known and most popular citizens of the Quaker city, and of him we'll talk another time.

These were the aristocrats of the stage world with whom Hogan had surrounded himself in that first "Smart Set" company. Their success was immediate both backstage and in the front of the house. Folks who had never dreamed of going to see a Negro show were now clamoring for an opportunity to witness their performances. Then—as now—it was of the mode to be that way. Lawrence Chenault later succeeded Norris.

A GOOD COMEDIAN

Hogan was the original "boisterous" comedian and he had great natural dramatic ability. He was a prolific writer of songs and among the best known were the detested "All Coons Look Alike to Me," "Missionary Man," "Wouldn't That be a Dream?" and "On Emancipation Day."

Hogan and a band featured that last-named song on Broadway for 40-odd weeks. He was a pioneer on the Great White Way and it was always his claim that he was the cause of Williams and Walker coming to New York from the west. These were his days of grandeur, his nights of glory and a jest of fate was that the former husband of Blanche was now his valet.

Hogan had been an unknown with Patti's Troubadours, with Cole and Johnson, with Williams and Walker, but ability and hard work had brought him out to rank with these nabobs of the stage. He was "made."

"Made," but death snatched the cup ere he had drained it to satiety. Possibly he was tubercular—I do not know—but illness marked him for its own at the height of his career and the final curtain came in 1909.

The "Unbleached American" had made his last bow to his nubile.



STERLING REX

Principal Member of the Dinwiddie Quartet

CLARENCE MUSE IS PLAYING AT NEW THEATRE

Reviewer On Local Daily Calls His Acting Artificial

For the first time in his career Clarence Muse, of Baltimore, returned home and played in a theatre into which none of the members of his race were admitted. Muse has a principal part in "Hearts in Dixie," the new Fox talking film with an all-colored cast which is playing the New Theatre this week. Editor's Note: The following is the opinion of a reviewer on the "Sun": "Hearts in Dixie" is a material in "Dixie" at the New

Theatre this week, it is unfortunate that no more is done with it than is evident in the photo-play. As it is, there are sketches of real merit strung loosely on a theme undeniably artistic in conception, but the photo-play has an undercurrent of artificiality. 4-6-29

The scenery is plainly artificial. The actors and actresses with but one exception go doggedly through their roles with the attitude of "speaking their pieces" if they die in the attempt. This includes Nappas, the aged Negro, who is almost always in the foreground, played by Clarence Muse. Moreover, Nappas is on the verge of tears. He never laughs except while glancing soulfully skyward.

Stepin Fetchit, as Gummy, is the notable exception. (He is real and is a character long to be remembered as about the laziest Negro one has ever known.)

The theme attempts to depict the rise of Nappas above his environment to the point where he sends his young grandson, the only relative left to cheer his declining days, north to be educated. The grandson is sent but with only the very few antecedent incidents bearing on the problem in the mind of the old Negro, it is a matter of little import to the audience wheth he goes or stays.

While this is the theme, it is evident that it is not the principal attraction planned for the picture. This attraction is in the portrayal of influences in Negro life, their emotions, manners and songs, their food times and their sorrows.

Here too, there is unreality and insincerity. There are a number of songs sung in the plantation . . . Negroes grouped about a dance, a barbecue or in wagons. But the reflection of the microphone is in their eyes, and on their faces the fixed expressions they have been instructed to assume.

Besides the activity—or rather the inactivity—of Gummy, there is real entertainment in the Negro dances. The crowds watch-

ing the dances are acutely aware that it all is make-believe, but the dancers lose themselves in the performance and take the movie audience with them for a while."

Robeson Back in London From Vienna Triumph

(From The London Sketch) Fresh from his triumphs in Vienna, Prague and Budapest, Paul Robeson the great Negro singer, has returned to London and will give a concert at the Albert Hall on Sunday.

"The people of Central Europe already know about me," he told the Daily Sketch. "for 'Ole Man River' was on all their gramophones. I think they half expected I was going to sing their jazz, for they had had little experience of the real Negro music, the spirituals."

Prague audiences, among whom joy and girl students were numerous, paid enthusiastic tribute to "Weeping Mary" and "Water Boy," while the number of British people who attended Mr. Robeson's concerts in Vienna and Budapest caused him much surprise.

"I suppose they read about me in the English newspapers," he said, "and for the people of the country I seemed to stand for 'something interesting out of America,' like Eugene O'Neill and Dreiser. Yes, I know Dreiser. He is a very clever fellow."

Asked if he visited the Viennese cabarets, Mr. Robeson said: "Yes, indeed, and I loved their gay waltzes as much as I loved the Tzigane music in Budapest."

In Budapest Robeson stayed in the Hun Hotel, "right on the Danube," but I never saw the "it is sung."

NEGRO PLAY, 'PORGY,' A LONDON SENSATION

Company Receives Eleven Curtain Calls at Close—Critics Acclaim Production.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES. LONDON, April 10.—The Theatre Guild's Negro play "Porgy," by Du-bose and Dorothy Heyward, created a sensation in London tonight when it was produced at His Majesty's Theatre with the original New York cast. There were eleven curtain calls at the finish and the critics acclaim the production as a stirring achievement.

The reviewer of The London Times says the actors have attained a "sort of orchestration of the life they have to represent." It adds "Catfish Row is familiar and intimate. Its gayety, fatalism and suffering become part of the atmosphere. Stretch out your hand and you'll feel the beating of the heart. Its songs, we are told, are the clatter of the Negroes and

lots and pans, seem continuous music, intricate and profound. The emotion is the emotion of a people, but it floods the theatre like a wave."